

**Contribution by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs to the report by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on civil society space**

**Procedures and practices in civil society involvement by DESA**

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) promotes and supports international cooperation in the pursuit of sustainable development for all. It addresses a range of cross-cutting issues that affect peoples' lives and livelihoods, especially the most vulnerable. It is fundamentally concerned, not only with global prosperity today, but also tomorrow, having as a foundation the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) supported by the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

In providing international cooperation support, UN DESA effectively engages members of the civil society in the different intergovernmental processes that it serves. It also functions as the liaison among civil society organizations and Member States. UN DESA's mission, to promote development for all, underscores the need for all stakeholders – governments, UN and other international organizations, civil society and the private sector – to do their part to improve economic and social well-being.

DESA provides support to (i) the NGO Committee, (ii) the Economic and Social Council, (iii) the Addis Ababa CSO Coordination Group, (iv) Global major groups and other stakeholders on sustainable development, (v) Engagement with the Committee of Experts on Public Administration, (vi) Commission for Social Development, (vii) Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, (viii) Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of People with Disability, (ix) Open-ended Working Group on Ageing, and (x) Commission on Population and Development.

**i. Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations**

The Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination has a specific relationship with civil society organizations as one of its Branches (the NGO Branch), provides secretariat services to the Committee on NGOs, which recommends granting consultative status to NGOs. As of now, 4,780 organizations have consultative status with ECOSOC. The attractiveness of the consultative status remains high, as exemplified by the record number of new applications received in 2016, i.e. 740. Applications received increased roughly 26% from 2015 to 2016, and 19% from 2016 to 2017. Around forty per cent come from the developing world. The organization of major UN events, such as the 2015 Summit to adopt the 2030 Agenda, the COP 21 or the UNGASS on Drugs in 2016 create an appetite for organizations that have not been involved in UN work until then to apply for status in order to sustain their contribution to global action.

The process of recommending granting consultative status has been criticized for its politicisation, especially when it comes to the consideration of human rights organizations, whose

work can challenge Member States and the political regimes in place. As a result, the consideration of some organizations defending special rights or peoples has been deferred at the Committee, sometimes for several years. The recent case of three organizations from Turkey whose consultative status was withdrawn by ECOSOC upon recommendation by the NGO Committee, because they had been dissolved in Turkey in connection to their alleged involvement in the failed coup in July 2016, has been considered by many as a threat to civil society involvement in UN work and a potential setback.

The recent correspondence between six Special Rapporteurs and the Chair of the NGO Committee illustrates these tensions. At its April 2017 Coordination and Management Meeting, ECOSOC decided that the future sessions of the NGO Committee would be webcasted in order to increase transparency of its proceedings. The impact of this decision, which has been welcome by many, on the content of the discussions at the Committee will be measured starting at its resumed session in May 2017.

## **ii. Economic and Social Council**

In addition to its work on the ECOSOC consultative status, the Office involves NGOs in the work of the Council. In accordance with ECOSOC resolution 1996/31, the Office launches an appeal for oral and written statements by NGOs in consultative status to the high level segment (HLS) of ECOSOC in July, using the CSONet platform. The written statements are published as part of the documentation of the Council and the list of organizations willing to make an oral presentation is drawn and submitted to the NGO Committee for approval. Organizations are usually asked to coordinate and have one speak on behalf of a group, given the little time left for organizations to speak at the HLS / HLPF general debate. This has created some frustration within the NGO community, but has not called into question or decreased participation to the event.

For the first time this year, NGOs have been invited to make written statements to the ECOSOC integration segment. Another important innovation is the space given to youth organizations, which may or may not have consultative status, to the annual ECOSOC Youth Forum. Because of the informal nature of the event, youth representatives alternate with delegates from Member states in the Room's seating arrangement. They are on an equal footing in the discussions that take place during the Forum. Many regional and thematic break-out sessions also allow for youth-led civil society organizations to exchange in a very open and informal setting.

## **iii. Addis Ababa CSO Coordination Group**

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have had a strong history of engagement in the Financing for Development (FfD) process since its inception, throughout the three major Conferences on Financing for Development (Monterrey Conference in 2002, Doha Conference in 2008 and Addis Ababa Conference in 2015). Following the principle of self-organization, CSOs that are active in the FfD process have a coordinated mechanism for CSO participation. The CSO FfD

Group, is a coordination mechanism with its own governance structure. Participation in the Group is open to all CSOs, who join a virtual listserv to engage in a dialogue about FfD-related issues. As of now, the group contains more than 800 organizations. The Addis Ababa CSO Coordination Group (ACG) is a 20-member, geographically diverse group which provides the coordination support for all members of the broader CSO FfD community. The ACG disseminates information across CSO networks and platforms, organizes the democratic and transparent selection of CSO speakers, and coordinates civil society messages and responses through an inclusive process. The ACG is now facilitating the CSO FfD Group's engagement in the FfD follow-up process, including the ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development follow-up and other related processes.

The Financing for Development Office (FfDO) is in regular contact with the ACG, providing updates and latest information on the state of preparations of the ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development follow-up (FfD Forum), the ECOSOC special meeting on international cooperation in tax matters and other related meetings. Given the modalities that are unique to the FfD process, CSOs are allotted three seats during all formal sessions of the FfD follow-up process and can intervene at the discretion of the ECOSOC President. Representatives from ECOSOC accredited organizations that have been selected by the ACG to speak are included in the list of speakers during the interactive dialogues and general debates. Civil society representatives are also active as speakers and panellists on a variety of themes.

Finally, highlighting the importance of CSO participation to achieve the Addis Agenda, FfDO has collaborated with the CSO FfD Group on a stakeholder workstream entitled "Exploring Public-Private Interfaces" with a view to critically assessing the evolving nature and forms of public and private sector interaction in the context of the FfD follow-up process and the broader Sustainable Development Agenda. The outcomes of this workstream will be discussed during the 2017 FfD Forum.

#### **iv. Global major groups and other stakeholders**

DESA, through its Stakeholder Engagement Programme, actively engages and works with global major groups and other stakeholders (MGoS) in sustainable development processes. These various stakeholder groups, as mandated by a number of General Assembly resolutions, are key actors in the work of the UN regarding sustainable development. Engagement with the representatives of these groups is done primarily through the High-level political Forum (HLPF) MGoS Coordination Mechanism (HLPF CM). This self organized, self governed platform, established with the support of DSD, provides these groups with a space in which to engage with the UN around HLPF preparation, work, and advocacy. Moreover, through the CM, stakeholder groups work together to select funded speakers and participants at the HLPF and other relevant meetings. Major groups representatives also take part in the sessions of the Forum on Forests.

MGoS bring fresh perspectives to the UN's work on sustainable development. They have been central to the transformative nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and their advocacy continues to ensure that a wide range of voices regarding the implementation, follow-up, and review of global sustainable development frameworks is heard. Although working with MGoS through their self-organized platform does make coordination and engagement more streamlined and simplified, it is still a challenge to bring together almost twenty diverse and disparate stakeholder groups. Although these groups ultimately cooperate well and are represented by organizations and individuals with a great deal of experience at the UN, it is always a challenge for DESA, with its limited resources, to coordinate and keep track of these groups. Striking a balance between the requests of Member States and the legal requirements of resolutions with the demands of stakeholders is never a simple task with simple solutions.

Ultimately, work around the capacity building, coordination, and engagement of MGoS and civil society in general has been smooth, considering the large number of meetings, conferences, and processes in which DESA is tasked with the organization of meaningful stakeholder engagement. With this in mind, DESA and its Stakeholder Engagement Programme will continue to work with MGoS to ensure the broad participation of stakeholders and civil society in the work of the UN and in its efforts to ensure the successful implementation, follow-up, and review of critical sustainable development frameworks like the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

#### **v. Committee of Experts on Public Administration**

DESA engages CSOs through formal invitations sent to over 4,000 non-profit organizations accredited with ECOSOC to attend the annual session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA). The Committee is a subsidiary body of ECOSOC that supports the work of the Council concerning the promotion and development of public administration and governance among the United Nations Member States, in connection with the internationally agreed development goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This invitation is broadcasted via the ECOSOC Civil Society Network (CSO-Net). All invitees have an opportunity to participate as observers and contribute to CEPA discussions throughout each Committee session. Conclusions and recommendations are captured in the Committee's session report which is submitted to ECOSOC for adoption.

In addition, DESA Division for Public Administration and Development Management has formal procedures to involve in its work research and other organizations engaged in development work through the United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN). This network consisting of approximately 30 public administration partner institutions from every region of the world is managed by the Division. The UNPAN Partners fit in the CSO definition as they aim to the betterment of public administration and governance in support of sustainable development.

Sharing the purpose of promoting the exchange of knowledge, experiences, good practices and lessons learned in public administration throughout the world, all UNPAN partners contribute

inputs to the portal [www.unpan.org](http://www.unpan.org). The inputs are in the form of news articles, upcoming events, research papers, resources, online courses and the quarterly issued UNPAN Newsletter. It is through this knowledge sharing network that partners get to know the work of other partners and engage with a broader spectrum of actors including CSOs within their respective countries.

Another way for CSOs to contribute to the work of DESA is by participating in various expert group meetings, workshops and training events organized by the Division at the global, regional or national levels. CSO representatives are encouraged to share their experience and expertise and participate in meeting discussions and deliberations. They also provide feedback on the reports of the aforementioned events. In particular, CSOs participation in capacity development workshops fosters dialogue between state and non-state actors. It is also critical for promoting a better understanding of the needs and plights of different social groups, particularly the most vulnerable or underrepresented in decision-making.

Engaging civil society in decision-making and in SDG implementation is also a topic that DESA works on and has conducted research on the various modalities governments are using in this regard.

DESA has also developed a structured framework to engage United Nations Online Volunteers in its research and analytical work. The Division won the “Online Volunteering Award” in recognition of this engagement activity for the UN E-Government Survey 2014, one of the flagship products of the Division.

Because information is a precondition for involving CSOs in the various areas of work of the United Nations, DESA social media uses information sharing to engage its followers on Facebook and twitter. This is aimed at sharing the work done by the Division and by other entities within the United Nations as well as UNPAN Partners. Social media outreach for major events is done through sharing of digital cards, infographics, tweets, and hashtagging trending UN topics, among others. Content is designed to address information requirements of a diverse audience including CSOs.

Finally, through its web site <https://publicadministration.un.org/>, DESA often receives queries, capacity development, advisory and other requests from several CSOs and individual actors. These requests are promptly addressed by professionals of the Division according to the specific substantive area where support is requested.

#### **vi. Commission for Social Development**

The sessions of the Commission for Social Development take place in February each year. Participation in the CSocD is ONLY open to NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC (General, Special and Roster). Online pre-registration tends to begin in late October or November and closes approximately 2 weeks before the session starts. NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC can pre-register up to 10 representatives to attend the sessions as observers.

Those who wish to engage with CSocD can:

- Submit written statements on the Commission's priority theme around 30 October;
- Apply to host side events related to the Commission's priority theme;
- Request to make oral presentations;

A two day civil society forum is organized right before the start of the Commission.

#### **vii. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

The sessions of the UNPFII tend to take place in April or May. Participation in the sessions of the Permanent Forum is open to NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC, Indigenous Peoples' Organizations (IPOs) and Academic Institutions. Online pre-registration tends to begin in February and closes approximately 2 weeks before the session starts.

All registered participants who wish to engage with UNPFII can:

- Make oral presentations at the forum depending on availability of time;
- Submit written statement; organizations must contact the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum to discuss the possibility of submitting such a report. The deadline for these reports/statements is 31st January of each year.

#### **viii. Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of People with Disability**

The sessions of the Conference of States Parties tend to take place in June each year. Participation is open to NGOs accredited by the Conference of States Parties. NGOs that have consultative status with ECOSOC or were accredited to the Ad Hoc Committee on the Convention are already accredited to the COSP. All other NGOs wishing to participate in the Conference MUST apply for accreditation. The online pre-registration tends to begin three months before the session starts. Prior to the opening of each session, civil society organizations convene a civil society forum.

#### **ix. Open-ended Working Group on Ageing**

The sessions of the Open Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWGA) tend to take place in July each year. Participation is open to NGOs accredited by the OEWGA.

Accreditation is the formal process by which NGOs are allowed to participate in the work of the OEWG. Accreditation is granted to organizations and not to individuals. NGOs in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) are automatically accredited to the OEWGA. However, they should pre-register online for each session. All other NGOs must apply for accreditation in order to participate in the sessions of the Open-ended Working Group. Accreditation to the OEWG need only be done once and applies for all sessions.

The UN Secretariat reviews applications against criteria outlined in paragraphs 44-45 of ECOSOC resolution 1996/31, and provides a list of NGOs seeking accreditation to States

members of the OEWG no later than two weeks prior to the second session and four weeks prior to following sessions of the OEWG to receive their comments.

NGOs wishing to be accredited to the Open-ended Working Group MUST follow the steps listed on the OEWG website.

The OEWGA adopted a decision entitled “Modalities of participation of non-governmental organizations in the work of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing”. In this regard, the OEWGA decided that accreditation of NGOs shall be granted to all relevant NGOs enjoying consultative status with the ECOSOC and that other relevant NGOs, not falling within the above category, may apply to the Secretariat for such accreditation, and that their applications should contain all the information on the competence of the organization and the relevance of its activities to the work of the Open-ended Working Group, as specified in paragraph 44 of ECOSOC resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996. In respect of those applications, the principle of equitable geographical participation of NGOs should be kept in mind and the arrangements outlined above shall not create a precedent for other open-ended working groups of the General Assembly.

#### **x. Commission on Population and Development**

For a long time, non-governmental organizations have participated in the annual meetings of the Commission on Population and Development according to the rules of procedure of ECOSOC. ECOSOC accredited NGOs are invited by the Commission to attend the annual meetings. They are also invited to submit written statements as well as oral statements. At the end of the plenary session, NGOs are given the floor to present their oral statements. Some delegations also include NGO representatives who will then present national statements under regular agenda items. Representatives of NGOs are not permitted to participate in informal consultations on draft resolutions or decisions that are held in parallel to the plenary meetings. Overall, NGO representatives play an important role in the Commission on Population and Development. They inform the debate and provide a perspective of people active in the field of population and development.

In addition, civil society is participating in migration-related processes in the General Assembly in accordance with the modalities for those meetings. They participate in events, multi-stakeholder panels and are invited to provide written inputs. They also attend the annual coordination meeting on international migration.

Staff from the Population Division is attending to NGOs participating in the annual sessions of the Commission on Population and Development, including registration and review of oral and written statements. In addition, staff is also supporting the migration-related events in the GA which the Division is requested to support. No additional resources have been provided to the Division so support these activities.